



COMMISSION ON AGING

February 10, 2011

Commission on Aging: Fiscal Year 2012 Testimony to County Executive

The Commission on Aging (COA) is pleased to submit the following testimony on behalf of seniors, having identified three out of the many budgetary issues that have had an adverse impact on frail, vulnerable seniors, low income seniors and the healthier, vital seniors.

Services to vulnerable, frail seniors: In a County perceived to have considerable wealth and resources, it is hard to believe that we have a significant number of poor seniors whose ability to have adequate care is compromised. Over the past three years, services to this population have been dramatically reduced, and we face both a service and a waiting list crisis.

How can we justify the increasing number of people (from 789 in July 2007 to 1632 today!) who are on a waiting list to be evaluated for both County and Medicaid funded services, services which already have long waiting lists? Today 72 fewer seniors receive home care than three years ago, and there is a waiting list for this service.

- Among those waiting for in-home service is an 89 year-old woman with many illnesses including congestive heart failure, who lives with a niece and requires aide services six hours a week to help with personal hygiene, dressing and preparing breakfast on days when her niece works.
- Waiting to be evaluated for help to maintain their independent living status is a couple, both of whom are in frail health and on a limited income. If and when they are evaluated, will they then be placed on a waiting list for services?

There is a high cost to not providing necessary services for these and the more than one thousand others on waiting lists – the cost of increased incidences in Emergency Room use and hospital and nursing home admissions, as well as the financial and emotional costs to caregivers.

Solution: First – “Do no harm!” Preserve the services we currently have without further cuts. Then – There must be an intensive effort to bring community services together to work as a group in meeting the needs of our ever-growing population of seniors and enabling them to remain in the community.

Transportation: Transportation and mobility – *being able to go where they want to go, when they want to go and how they want to get there* – is the single greatest challenge older adults face is their ability to remain independent. The decline in County transit funding has impacted seniors greatly. Reducing bus and Ride-On routes and limiting free Ride-On has resulted in decreased senior ridership. Since the change was made in Fiscal Year 2011, there has been a 2% decline, or 350 boardings per day, by older adults who no longer use Ride-On. Their inability to have adequate, easily accessible transportation results in fewer opportunities for socialization, physical activity and mental stimulation, as well as preventive diagnostic and therapeutic healthcare, all of which are essential to seniors’ ability to maintain a healthy, vital life style.

Solution: Do not increase Ride-On fares or decrease the hours available for free senior rides. Evaluate whether changes in bus routes have denied some seniors access to community center nutrition sites or libraries. Engage in a concerted effort to develop alternative public-private partnerships that provide transportation for seniors.

Recreation: Decreases in the budget of the Department of Recreation have resulted in the elimination of senior programs and the closing of eight recreation programs specially designed to engage older adults in the very activities described above that keep them healthy and vital.

Solution: Increase partnerships with volunteer groups such as CASSA, County hospitals, congregations and businesses. Create an “Adopt a Community Center” program similar to “Adopt a Road.” Enable the Recreation Department to directly raise revenues and then apply those revenues to provide programs specifically for seniors.

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